

BOOK REVIEW

Seleukid Royal Women: Creation, Representation and Distortion of Hellenistic Queenship in the Seleukid Empire. Edited by ALTAY COŞKUN and ALEX MCAULEY. Stuttgart, GR.: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. Pp. 1 - 322. Hardcover, €62. ISBN 978-3-515-11295-6.

Coşkun and McAuley present fourteen essays on women in the Seleucid dynasty. The majority of the papers originated as presentations at the conference *Seleukid Royal Women: Roles, Representations, and Expectations* in Montreal in February 2013. Individual chapters use a variety of approaches, such as textual analysis, numismatics, sculptural iconography, and gender studies, to highlight different aspects of the queens in the Seleucid Empire. The volume is divided into three sections: the first focuses on social experimentation in the early generations of the dynasty, the second on representation, and the third on public and private roles of the queens in dynastic marriages.

The work addresses an important gap in the scholarship: interest in Hellenistic queenship has grown considerably in the last decade, and works on Ptolemaic queens have appeared,¹ but this is the first book-length study of the Seleucid queens. The audience is primarily scholarly, assuming familiarity with Hellenistic history and the literary sources. Individual papers focus on issues of interpretation, balance, and reception, not on presenting a single unified narrative. Within that context the authors and editors have made the work highly accessible, cross-referencing relevant discussions, providing translations of passages in primary sources, and establishing the scholarly context of each discussion.

Considerations of space prevent detailed discussion of each contribution; I will focus on representative chapters: “The Diplomacy of Seleukid Women: Apama and Stratonike,” by Gillian Ramsey and “Female Seleukid Portraits: Where Are They?” by Sheila Ager and Craig Hardiman.

¹ Especially: Clayman, D.L. 2014. *Berenice II and the Golden Age of Ptolemaic Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Oppen de Ruiter, B.F. van. 2015. *Berenice II Euergetis: Essays in Early Hellenistic Queenship*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Carney, E.D. 2013. *Arsinoë of Egypt and Macedon: a Royal Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

While surviving narrative accounts of Apama and Stratonice focus on their marriages as their most prominent diplomatic contributions to the Seleucid dynasty, Ramsey gathers scattered evidence that suggests their engagement in ongoing diplomatic programs. Ramsey argues that the Milesian decree honoring Apama in 299 BCE emerges from her enduring relationship with the Milesian soldiers who campaigned in Sogdia, where Apama's father had been satrap and where she presumably maintained diplomatic contacts. Ramsey suggests Apama relied on her Persian connections to support herself and the infant Antiochus I in Babylon during Seleucus' exile from 316 to 311 BCE, perhaps contributing to his return. Again, the loyalty of Sogdia during Seleucus' rise to power points to Apama's political influence there. Thus, Ramsey argues that Apama's connections within the Persian nobility allowed her to provide ongoing support for Seleucus that complemented their Macedonian-Persian marriage.

Again, in the case of Stratonice I, best known for her dynastic marriages to Seleucus I and Antiochus I, Ramsey argues for her diplomatic activities. For example, Ramsey cites Stratonice's dedications to Artemis and Apollo at Delos as being in her name, being objects originating from her birth family, and identifying her in terms of her birth family, taking these as evidence that she maintained the same sort of network of aristocratic associations as Apama. Ramsey's argument that the early Seleucid queens were not merely tokens in dynastic marriages, but active agents on the political stage is persuasive. Although the available evidence is scant and some of Ramsey's reconstructions are necessarily speculative (e.g. Apama's role in Seleucus' return to Babylon in 311), Ramsey's model, that the queens belonged to aristocratic networks in addition to their royal marriages, and that they contributed to the coordination of their families' mutual interests is both coherent and fits the available evidence.

In "Female Seleukid Portraits: Where Are They?" Ager and Hardiman survey evidence for portraits of Seleucid queens from the beginnings of the empire to the early second century, arguing that, in contrast to Ptolemaic practice which favored female royal portraiture in their self-presentation, the Seleucids avoided it until the early second century when they approached the Ptolemaic practice. Acknowledging their conclusions must be provisional, and the problematic *ex silentio* argument, Ager and Hardiman present a reasonable model that the Seleucids pursued a coherent practice of self-presentation that minimized female royal portraiture.

The chapter devotes considerable space to methodological issues, such as defining the scope of "Seleucid queens", problems identifying specific portrait types, issues of evidence particular to the Seleucid Empire, and interpretation of female

invisibility in royal portraiture. In that context, Ager and Hardiman's model makes sense of the available evidence: statues of early Seleucid queens known to have existed from surviving epigraphy are confined to the Greek cities in the empire, and seem to originate with the cities to curry favor, not at the command of the Seleucids. Similarly, regarding coin portraits, the apparent Seleucid practice of representing male royals seems to accord with Seleucid self-presentation generally as heroic, active figures and with earlier Persian practice. This may reflect a choice to differentiate themselves from the Ptolemies, whose self-presentation of familial harmony looks back to Egyptian precedent and instantiates itself in the jugate coin portraits of Ptolemaic kings and queens. Similarly, Ager and Hardiman suggest the change in Seleucid practice to include female royal portraiture on coins in the second century coincides with a shift in ideology from military victory to dynastic continuity.

These chapters are representative of the volume in that they approach narrow problems of interpretation, address the issue of the paucity of evidence by appealing to a variety of source-materials and methodologies, and provide models for understanding that evidence that are self-consciously provisional and sometimes speculative, but provide reasonable and coherent organization of the available evidence. As such, the volume does not attempt to present a coherent narrative of the history or roles of Seleucid royal women; what it does accomplish is to present a critical examination of the main lines of research, such as social experimentation with the role of *basilissa*, and representation of royal women in the Seleucid Empire. Consequently, while the audience is primarily specialists, the book is also useful for those with a general knowledge of Hellenistic history to gain a sense of the current controversies surrounding the Seleucid queens.

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